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ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC,
FROM THE
SOCIETY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

IN the venerable Constitution handed down to us, through a long succession of ages, from our Saxon and British ancestors, this is the basis and the vital principle—**LAW, TO BIND ALL, MUST BE ASSENTED TO BY ALL.**

And it was their felicity to have made that “best discovery of political wisdom,” whereby this assent of all throughout the realm was to be collected and carried into execution; namely, a freely-chosen, a full and equal **REPRESENTATION**. But it was foreseen, that to delegate the power of enacting Laws to a single assembly of Representatives, or to a single Council, or a single Magistrate, would be to establish at once a despotism; and to divide it between Two only, would not provide a lasting security against that evil; for that which should once acquire the ascendant, would necessarily render itself absolute. Hence it was wisely settled that the Legislature should consist of **THREE** distinct powers, with different gradations of dignity, and consequently different individual interests; while the harmonizing of the whole should produce the good of the State: so that by reason of this diversity of individual interests, and the opposing sentiments and passions thence naturally excited, every matter proposed might be exhibited in all possible lights, and undergo a full and free discussion; and nothing become **LAW**, but through the medium of mature deliberation, and mutual concessions to that grand interest which was common to all.

These three powers we call King, Lords, and Commons.

It is on all hands agreed, that this institution of government is excellently adapted to the security of that **FREEDOM** which is our *common inheritance*. But this is only acknowledged, so long as each of these powers remains *independent* of either or both of the other two: for, if one of them should lose its independence, it is evident that our government, notwithstanding outward appearances, would consist of only *two powers*; and if *two* should lose their independence, it is equally evident that our government, although *three in form*, would in effect consist of only *one power*.

The moment that either the Crown, the Lords, or the Commons lose their independence, in that moment our Constitution is violated, our Government is overturned, and our Liberty is endangered.

As every Englishman has an equal inheritance in this Liberty; and in those Laws and that Constitution which have been provided for its defence; it is therefore necessary that every Englishman should know what that Constitution is; when it is **SAFE**; and when **ENDANGERED**.

To

To diffuse this knowledge universally throughout the realm, to circulate it through every village and hamlet, and even to introduce it into the humble dwelling of the cottager, is the wish and the hope of this Society.

They trust it is a wish that will be approved by all good men; and that it is a hope not ill founded, in a country whose love of Liberty is its characteristic, and where every thing generous, and in favour of that Liberty, is congenial with the best and warmest feelings of the people.

So extremely simple are those first principles of our Constitution, upon which depends THE LIBERTY OF THE PEOPLE, that the Society are convinced any such institution as theirs had for ever been unnecessary, had not certain of our Parliaments, without authority, unjustly, and against their fidelity, despising the wisdom of the great founders of our government, and the rights of their constituents, departed from and violated this sound maxim of popular Freedom, that "To the bulk of any nation, destined to *labour* and not to *study*, to *act* and not to *speculate*, it is necessary to enjoy the *possession* undiminished, and the constant *exercise* unabridged, of its legislative or ELECTION RIGHTS, as *the only possible means* by which it can retain a *knowledge* of those Rights, and of their inestimable value; or by which it can preserve its Liberty."

It has been justly observed by a distinguished writer*, that "When a PEOPLE have lost the power of legally asserting their Rights, they are exposed to that which is THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF POLITICAL RUIN, the loss of even *the remembrance* of them." And, agreeable to the above maxim, another excellent author informs us, that "Our Saxon forefathers established their government in Britain, before the transactions of mankind were recorded in writing, at least among the northern nations: they, therefore, handed down to posterity the principles of their government, BY THE ACTUAL EXERCISE OF THEIR RIGHTS; which became the ancient usage and custom of the people, and the law of the land. And hence it came to pass, that when this ancient custom and usage *ceased* to act, *the remembrance* of the custom ceased with it. We may add to this, that, since the Conquest, our arbitrary kings, and men of arbitrary principles, have endeavoured to destroy the few remaining records and historical facts, that might keep in remembrance a form of government so kind, friendly, and hospitable to the human species†."

It is the aim of this Society to supply, as far as may be, the want of those destroyed records, and to revive in the minds of their fellow-citizens, THE COMMONALTY AT LARGE, a knowledge of their lost Rights; so that, knowing the value of their Inheritance, and the absolute necessity of exercising their Election Rights as *extensively* and as *constantly* as our sacred Constitution and its great Founders intended, they may restore Freedom and Independency to that branch of the legislature which originates from, represents, and is answerable to THEMSELVES.

That this Independency hath been unconstitutionally incroached upon, hath long, from its notoriety, been the public sentiment, and is now the public complaint: and even the Commons' House of Parliament itself hath

* De Lolme's Constitution of England, p. 210.

† Historical Essay on the English Constitution, p. 8.

acknowledged both the justice and the necessity of this complaint, by its memorable vote on the 6th day of this month.

If there be any one cause of alarm to the People of England of greater magnitude than all others, it is such a confession as this on the part of their representatives in the legislature: it is big with solemn warning; it is full of serious admonition.

Hence all those who have a regard for their peace, their property, or their sacred laws; all who feel the tender affections of kindred, or children, or parents; all who are friendly to society, or who love their country; who are inspired by gratitude to the Founders and Preservers of this Constitution, and who wish to leave it as an inheritance to posterity; are called upon by every consideration which can awaken sleeping virtue, or stimulate the breast to wise and generous actions for their own and their country's good, thoroughly to inform themselves what the Constitution is; what is its present DANGER; and by what means it may be placed in SAFETY.

April 1780.

RULES AND RESOLUTIONS

OF THE

SOCIETY

FOR

CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

RESOLVED,

I. **T**HAT Constitutional Tracts, tending to revive in the minds of the commonalty at large a knowledge of their lost rights, particularly such as respect the election and duration of the representative body, and to impress them with a sense of their importance, be distributed at the expence of the Society, and under its direction.

II. That this Society be subject to such laws and regulations as a majority of a General Meeting shall from time to time ordain.

III. That this Society be unlimited in its numbers, and that no one shall be esteemed a member who hath not subscribed and paid, at least, One Guinea towards its expence; and that no annual subscription shall exceed Five Guineas; and if any one shall choose to compound by paying down Thirty Guineas he shall be deemed a perpetual member.

IV. That at any General Meeting the several laws or regulations may be read over, and altered or annulled, and that no alteration in the rules or laws of this Society shall take place, unless confirmed at a Second General Meeting.

V. That this Society shall hold Four stated General Meetings in the year; viz. the First on the second Tuesday in November, the Second on the last Tuesday in November, the Third on the First Tuesday in March, and

and the Fourth on the last Tuesday of the same month, at Six o'clock in the Afternoon, where the President and Treasurer, Two Vice Presidents and Treasurer, or the Treasurer and Committee, shall appoint, and such persons respectively shall have power to call an extraordinary General Meeting; notice of which to be given by the Secretary.

VI. That no business shall be concluded at any General Meeting, unless there shall be at least Thirteen members present; but if Nine shall be present, they shall have power to adjourn the meeting to some future day; notice whereof shall be given by letter from the Secretary.

VII. That if the Committee shall recommend to any General Meeting, that the thanks of this Society be given to the author of any ingenious and useful publications, it shall be the first business at the next General Meeting to be entered upon after the first reading of the minutes; and any author, so thanked by this Society, may then be proposed as an honorary member; and if not more than two negatives be put on the question, he shall be a member accordingly without any subscription.

VIII. That at the Second General Meeting in November in every year, the first business after the reading of the minutes of the last meeting (except there be a recommendation from the Committee for a vote of Thanks for a publication) shall be the election of the Officers and Committee for the year ensuing.

IX. That all questions in this Society be determined by ballot; and that all ballots be taken by the President or presiding member.

X. That all members shall be chosen at a General or Monthly Meeting; and that no candidate shall be proposed for a member, unless his recommendation hath been presented, at least Eight Days, to the Committee at some former meeting.

XI. That no person shall be proposed to be a member of this Society, unless he be recommended by one member, and the proposal seconded by another.

XII. That if any candidate at his election shall have Two negatives, he is thereby for ever rendered incapable of being a member.

XIII. That no person shall be on the Committee who shall have had One negative: but lest such negatives should have been given through mistake, a Second ballot shall be had in both these cases, provided it be immediately demanded.

XIV. That if any person be thought an improper member, the Society at a General Meeting have the power of expulsion.

XV. That there be stated General Monthly Meetings of the Society to receive the reports from the Committee.

XVI. That all proceedings of the Society and its Committee be fairly transcribed into proper books for that purpose by the Secretary from the rough minutes, against the next meetings of the Society and Committee; and that every member hath a right to inspect these books by applying to the Secretary.

XVII. That all books and papers belonging to this Society shall be kept locked up by the Secretary when not in use.

XVIII. It being absolutely necessary that this Society should be certain of its funds, it is resolved that no one shall be deemed a member, who shall have neglected paying his annual subscription within Three months after his

his election, or being three months in arrear; nor allowed to be present at any meeting of this Society until he has paid up his arrears, provided notice shall have been sent him, by the Secretary, to one of his usual places of abode One month before the Three Months are expired: And that all subscriptions in aid of the Society be annual.

XIX. That there be a general audit of the Treasurer's accounts twice in every year; viz. on the Second Tuesday in December, and the Second Tuesday in May; and on those days the members of the Society do dine together at 4 o'clock at such central place as the Treasurer shall appoint, who shall order a dinner to be provided, not exceeding 4s. per head; and that immediately after dinner one of the Auditors shall read a summary state of the accounts so audited; and on these audit dinners each member shall have the privilege to bring with him a friend, provided he send in his name to the Treasurer at least three days before; and that the President, Vice-Presidents, and Treasurer, shall be at liberty to introduce to dinner two friends, each giving the same notice to the Treasurer.

XX. That Five Auditors of Accounts be appointed from among the members who are not of the Committee, at the General Meeting preceding each audit day, who shall have power to examine, audit, and pass the Treasurer's accounts, and to state the particulars of the same to the First General Meeting after the audit day, which accounts shall be signed by Three of the auditors at least.

XXI. That a Committee for printing and correspondence, consisting of Twenty-one members, be chosen; but that each member of this Society hath a right to attend and vote; and that any Five of this Committee be sufficient to do business, and to draw on the Treasurer for the necessary expences; and that the Treasurer be always one.

XXII. That there shall go off from the Committee every year One Third of its members, and the like number be chosen in their stead from the Society at large.

XXIII. That there be Weekly Meetings of the Committee from the First Friday in October to the First Friday in May; after which the Committee meetings shall be once in each of the Months of June, July, August, and September, with power to adjourn from time to time.

XXIV. That the chair be taken at Seven o'clock precisely, after which no Tea, Coffee, or Wine shall be permitted in the Committee.

XXV. That no pamphlet or publication shall be printed at the expence of this Society, the cost of which, when ready for delivery, shall exceed 3d. each, unless it is recommended by a subscriber of Thirty Guineas; except the recommender will be at the extra expence, a calculation of which shall be made, and the money paid into the hands of the Treasurer before it goes to press; and in such case, the said member shall have, at his own disposal, one third of the number printed, provided the first cost of such publication shall amount to 6d. each; but in case the first cost be under 6d. and more than 3d. the said member shall only be entitled to one fourth of the impression.

XXVI. That every member, whether a subscriber of One Guinea or more, shall be entitled to the disposal of a certain proportion according to the money subscribed. And for the satisfaction of the members, and that no error be committed in the division, there shall be a regular table of

of proportions made out by the Secretary for the perusal of the members; who shall be first served, with the quota, if demanded, and the remainder be at the disposal of the Committee.

XXVII. That each member have a right to recommend to the Committee any tract to be printed by the Society, provided it be in the possession of the Committee for their consideration at least Eight days (unless upon occasions which may require giving earlier information to the public) and be approved of by Two thirds of the members present.

XXVIII. That to prevent impositions on the Public, there shall be printed the following words on the Title and last pages of every publication amounting to a sheet or more, *Printed and Distributed GRATIS by the Society for Constitutional Information.*

N. B. Letters of Communication to the Society to be directed
To Mr. T. Yeates, N^o 2 New Inn, Wych-Street.

*Extracts from the Resolutions of the Westminster Committee
respecting the Constitutional Rights of the English People.*

*King's Arms Tavern, New Palace Yard,
Monday, March 20, 1780.*

RESOLVED,

THAT Annual Parliaments are the undoubted right of the People of England, and that the act which prolonged their duration was subversive of the Constitution, and a violation on the part of the representatives of the sacred trust reposed in them by their constituents.

RESOLVED,

That the present state of the representation of this country is inadequate to the object, and a departure from the first principles of the Constitution.

RESOLVED,

Nov. 17, 1780.

That as the voice of the Commons of England is no less necessary for every legislative purpose, than that of either the King or the Lords, the People have a just and inherent privilege to correct the abuses of representation, whenever such abuses shall have so increased as to rob them of their constitutional share in their own government.

April 4, 1781.

Whereas assertions have been thrown out respecting the present associations of the counties, cities, and corporate bodies of this kingdom, representing them as unconstitutional and illegal, and as tending to endanger the public tranquillity,

RESOLVED,

That the People of England have an undoubted right to assemble peaceably, in order to consider and resolve upon the proper measures for restoring the freedom and independency of the Commons House of Parliament, to appoint Committees of correspondence, with a view of assisting in the prosecution of that design, and to associate in a legal manner for the purpose of carrying such resolutions into effect.

DECLARATION

OF THOSE

Rights of the Commonalty of Great Britain,

Without which they cannot be FREE.

IT IS DECLARED,

FIRST, That the government of this realm, and the making of laws for the same, ought to be lodged in the hands of King, Lords of Parliament, and Representatives of the *whole body* of the freemen of this realm.

2dly, That *every man* of the commonalty (excepting infants, insane persons, and criminals) is, of common right, and by the laws of God, a *Freeman*, and entitled to the full enjoyment of *Liberty*.

3dly, That liberty, or freedom, consists in having an *actual share* in the appointing of those who frame the laws, and who are to be the guardians of every man's life, property, and peace: for the *ALL* of one man is as dear to him as the *ALL* of another; and the poor man has an *equal* right, but *more* need, to have representatives in the legislature than the rich one.

4thly, That they who have *no* voice nor vote in the electing of representatives *do not enjoy* liberty, but are absolutely *enslaved* to those who *have* votes, and to their representatives: for to be enslaved, is to have governors whom *other men have set over us*, and to be subject to laws *made by the representatives of others*, without having had representatives of our own to give consent in *our* behalf.

5thly, That a *very great majority* of the commonalty of this realm are denied the privilege of voting for representatives in parliament; and consequently they are enslaved to a *small number*, who do now enjoy this privilege exclusively to themselves; but who, it may be presumed, are far from wishing to continue in the exclusive possession of a privilege, by which their fellow-subjects are deprived of *common right*, of *justice*, of *liberty*; and which, if not communicated to *ALL*, must speedily cause the *certain overthrow of our happy constitution*, and enslave us *ALL*. And,

6thly and lastly, We also say and do assert, that it is *the right* of the commonalty of this realm to elect a new House of Commons once in *every* year, according to ancient and sacred laws of the land: because, whenever a parliament continues in being for a *longer term*, very great numbers of the commonalty, who have arrived at the years of manhood since the last election, and *therefore* have a right to be actually represented in the House of Commons, are then *unjustly deprived* of that right. At the same time the cause of virtue suffers through the dissipation and extravagance of the
rising

rising generation, whom the enjoyment of the annual and universal right of suffrage would recall from unworthy pleasures, and animate to the full exertion of every generous and patriotic principle which can ornament the mind of man.

When the above Declaration is compared with the present long parliaments, and unequal representation of the people, which have brought this kingdom to the brink of ruin, every true friend to his country is solemnly called upon to use his utmost endeavours for the restoration of annual parliaments, and that right of voting, which God and the Constitution have given him. In his hearty labours to obtain these civil and just rights, let every one practise the Christian rule, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. Then will that blessed æra come, when every man shall be free and happy under his vine, on earth peace, and consequently glory to God in the highest.

A REAL FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE.

EXTRACT from a Treatise of POLITIC POWER,

Written by Dr. JOHN POYNET, Bishop of Winchester, in 1556,
banished by Queen Mary.

At this time particularly recommended to the public attention.

AND because public matters of a realm, that concern all and every man's life, wife, children, lands, goods, and whatsoever cannot be treated on by all men, but all must put their trust in a few, men ought to be wise, and circumspect whom they trust: for there be too many that pass not what become of their neighbours, so they may prosper themselves; what become of the whole realm, so their own families may stand still. He that maketh suit to be a deputy for a multitude, seemeth to sue for his own vain-glory or profit. Those that send letters not to choose this man, but to choose such a man, have in their heads more than the universal wealth of all. He that bringeth letters to be preferred, meaneth not the benefit of them whom he would serve. He that giveth money, and maketh great feasts, thinketh some other fetch than the service of his neighbours. He that refuseth or releaseth his ordinary wages, looketh for some greater extraordinary reward. He that is always or oft at princes' platters, or in practisers' palaces, cannot long continue the peoples' true proctor.

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By the Society for Constitutional Information.